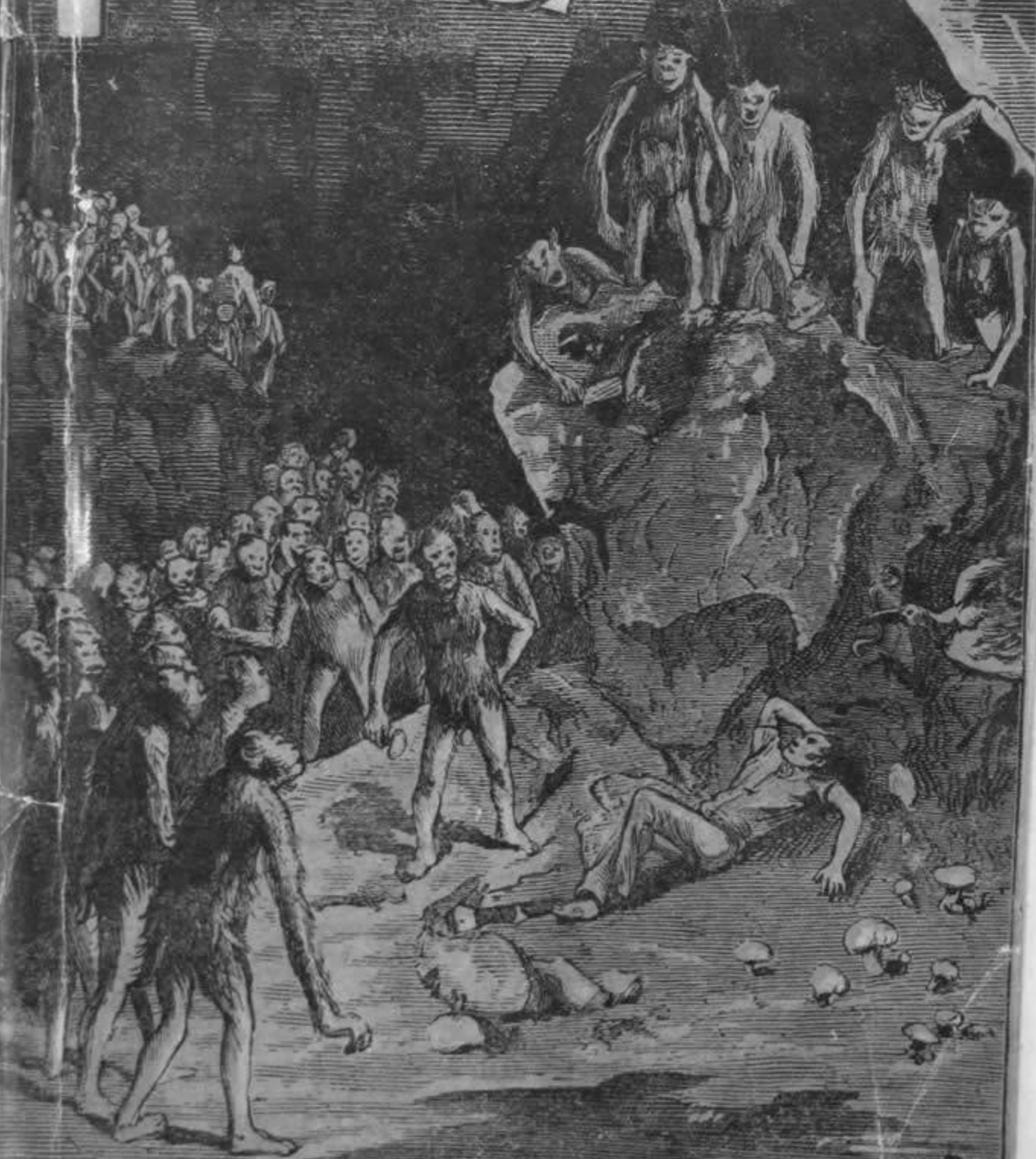


PHOSPHOR



JACOBI



F. J. Sherry

PHOSPHOR:

An † Ischian † Mystery.

By

J. FILMORE SHERRY.



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PREFACE.

ONE evening about three months ago—at a card party given by a Bohemian acquaintance of mine—I met a man who interested me strangely. We seemed instinctively to take a fancy to each other, and, when we left, exchanged addresses—he promising to call at my hotel the following evening.

He did so, and we sat talking and smoking until past midnight.

Occasionally he would stop in the middle of a sentence and fall into a reverie, then would rouse himself with an effort and continue what he was saying. This is the only peculiarity I noticed about him.

During our conversation he casually mentioned that he was thirty years old. This I rather doubted, as he looked at least over forty. He did not seem at all well, and I told him he should take care of himself.

He laughed, and said that he had consumption, and that the pleasure he would lose by taking care of himself would hardly compensate for the extra few weeks he might live.

After this we visited each other constantly, until one day, calling on him, I was told he had left. At the end of a week I received a letter asking me to come and see him at Queenscliff; he added that he wished to see me particularly.

I went and found him very ill. He told me he did not expect to live more than a few days. I insisted on his obtaining medical advice.

To avoid an inquest he consented. The doctor confirmed his prognosis, adding that he might die at any moment.

He took it very quietly, and said he was not very sorry.

He died a week after my arrival; the day before, he gave me a packet of papers, with instructions to read them after he was dead.

He assured me what I would read in them was perfectly true and had occurred to himself. He also gave me permission to publish them if I cared to. He gave me his solicitors' address, and asked me to forward his will and a few other papers to them. He died on the 28th of July last. After his death I did as he had requested.

I read the papers he had given me, and determined to have them published. If they are true they are wonderful.

He showed me the lock of hair alluded to in the following pages, but would not give it me.

That was all he had to vouch for the truth of what he had written. On the other hand, he may have thought he passed through it all in the delirium caused by the snake-bite and earthquake combined. I will not make any comments, but leave it for all who read his story to decide. I copy it verbatim from his papers.

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DEDICATED BY THE AUTHOR

TO

HIS MOTHER.



PHOSPHOR:

AN ISCHIAN MYSTERY.

CHAPTER I.

WHEN the world reads this it will in all probability put me down as a madman, but in this as in many other instances the world will be wrong.

It would be no wonder if I was mad after what I passed through, yet I do not think at any time my senses were clearer than they are at present.

When the world has a chance (and it usually has) of saying anything good or bad about a man or woman it will generally choose the latter, and I do not blame it; for taking the general run of men and women (I cannot leave them out) there is far more bad (luckily never seen or shown), than there is of good which is paraded on the surface for the world to see, and each individual knowing how much he or she conceals, at once judges others by himself or herself.

However, for what the world will say I care nothing; in fact when this is published I shall probably be where the opinion of the world can

have no effect upon me ; and if I should be alive the few people who know me, and perchance may guess I have written these pages, will either believe me or else I shall lose the little friendship they may have for me.

That will not matter, as there is not a single soul now living for whom I feel the slightest love or interest. I shall not use my real name, as I have no desire for notoriety, nor do I wish people to gaze askance at me as a natural curiosity while walking about the streets.

Men consider me morose ; for women I feel no interest, so their opinion troubles me even less than that of men. None of my acquaintances know anything concerning my past life, therefore, I shall have no hesitation in giving an accurate account of a few needful particulars in reference to my family and early history.

My mother was English, but had been brought up in Italy (that land of a thousand memories) and had lived in Naples the greater part of her life before she met my father ; he was also English, and whilst travelling through Naples had seen her. He stayed there for some time, then married and took her back to England with him. I was their only child, and was born on the 28th July, 1856, in Queen's Road, Peckham, near London.

My father was a speculator, and had made a large fortune; success made him sanguine, he embarked his whole capital with his dearest friend in an undertaking from which he expected to retire a millionaire.

His friend proved a swindler, and one morning he woke up to find himself ruined. The blow proved too much for him.

In the evening he said good-night to my mother as usual, and retired to his study.

In the morning he was not in his room when the servant knocked, so she informed my mother, who arose with terrible forebodings, and hastened to the library. The door was locked. They knocked—received no answer—broke it down, and there, sitting in his arm-chair before his desk, was all that remained of my father.

He left a letter to my mother, saying he had lost everything, and, being old, did not see any chance of recovering his losses, so thought the best thing he could do was to kill himself.

He called down the vengeance of God on the wretch who had ruined him, and ended by asking her to forgive him for leaving her.

I will pass over the inquest, merely stating that the verdict was suicide from prussic acid. My mother was very ill for some time, and when she

recovered we moved to Kent, and rented a pretty cottage.

Oh! thou beautiful county, how I now long for those peaceful days spent amongst thy woods and green fields.

When our affairs were settled my mother found she only had five hundred a year, which had fortunately been settled on her at her marriage.

She could not bear me out of her sight; so, instead of sending me to school, she procured me a tutor, who, seeing I had an aptitude for learning, took pains to teach me all he knew, and he being an extremely clever man, I derived no small benefit from his services.

I had no companions of my own age, and having little else to do, found the time passed with him was the most pleasant during the day. His had been an unlucky life. Whilst he was studying his parents died, and finding himself without the necessary funds to last him through his examination, he was obliged to leave the University and take to teaching as a means of gaining a livelihood.

He, however, always cherished the idea of one day being a qualified medical practitioner.

From his constant reference to this subject he instilled into my mind a desire to become a member of that profession. So after passing the preliminary examination with ease, and with much

persuasion having gained the consent of my mother, when I was seventeen I went to Edinburgh. Here, with the exception of occasional visits to Kent, I stayed for four years, and at the end of that time found myself at liberty to write M.B. after my name.

The next two years were spent in visiting the chief continental laboratories. I embodied my researches in toxicology in my graduation thesis for M.D., and received special commendation and a gold medal for it.

I then went to live with my mother in Kent. I started practice and—fell in love.

The object of my affections was one of my first patients. And in our first meeting was a touch of romance. Walking one day in a wood near our home, I heard a woman's voice crying for help, and rushing to the spot I found a beautiful girl sitting on a bank of green moss, weeping and calling for help by turns. I enquired if I could be of any assistance. She told me she was one of a picnic party, and wandering about had lost her friends; trying to reach some nuts she had trod on a stick, and was afraid she had sprained her ankle, as she could not move it without great pain. All this was told in the prettiest way imaginable between her sobs.

I informed her I was a doctor, and proffered my services to bandage the ankle.

She looked at me for a moment, doubtless thinking my youthful appearance more befitting a schoolboy than a full blown medico.

I, seeing her hesitation, hastened to assure her—"I am Dr. Morton and live in Sittingborne."

Looking at me through tears that made her face look more bewitching she said, "Oh! are you Dr. Morton;—I thought he was much older than you seem to be?"

Then quickly with an assumption of dignity that made her look simply irresistible—"I beg your pardon! you must think me very rude, I, I—"

But the pain becoming too great, she dropped her dignified attitude and again commenced to cry. Without waiting any longer I took out my pocket-knife and kneeling down ripped up her little French kid boot and stocking.

The ankle was already very much swollen, so bidding her keep quiet for a few moments, I ran to a brook that was luckily near and dipping my handkerchief in hurried back.

I placed it round her foot (and a dear little foot it was) as carefully as I could, but though I hardly touched it she could not help now and then giving a cry of pain. Having finished I asked her in which direction she thought her friends were, but she did not know.

So I shouted out several times without receiving any answer.

What was to be done? Whatever it was required doing speedily, as the ankle needed properly bandaging.

Here was I with a sweetly pretty girl alone in the wood. The situation was rather embarrassing; but at that moment I would not have exchanged it for any other in the world.

"The only way I can think of," I said, "is for you to wait here, while I run to the nearest parish and try to get a conveyance of some sort or other to take you home. Where do you live?"

She raised her eyes piteously to my face.

"I am staying at Mrs. Mavis's in Sittingborne. Oh! please don't go away, they will not know what has become of me. What am I to do?"

"Well, as you will not let me leave you, I shall have to take you with me; you do not look very heavy."

"Do you think you could carry me. It is quite a mile to our place."

I waited no longer, but bending down lifted her carefully in my arms, so as to hurt her as little as possible, and strode through the woods.

CHAPTER II.

CAN I describe her? Is it possible for me to describe such bewitching loveliness?

My darling, could my pen do you justice? No! a thousand times, no!

Whatever I should say could give but a feeble idea of you. It was not only your face, or your form, there was an indescribable something about you essentially your own.

You were yourself, that was enough for me. None other in my eyes could be like you.

When you cried you looked prettier than another woman when she smiles. When you smiled I seemed to be nearer God—my brain whirled with excess of joy.

How I blessed that picnic party! The wood for attracting her from her friends, the nuts for causing her to desire them, and most of all, the stick for spraining her ankle! I was thoroughly selfish.

I always have been. I thought nothing of her pain, but merely saw in it a means for me to win her for my wife.

Yes! Already, in three quarters of an hour I was madly in love, as an hour before, I should not have dreamed it possible for me to be.

I looked at her lying in my arms.

What a lovely picture she made! Her closed eyes caused her dark lashes to sweep her cheeks.

Her lips apart disclosed to my enraptured gaze two rows of small pearly teeth; her dead golden coloured hair had become unfastened, and partly hid one of her pink cheeks; beneath her muslin and lace dress I could see the gentle motion of her bosom.

Her contracted forehead, and the corners of her mouth occasionally twitching, showed me she was still in pain; the whole made a picture, the like of which very few men have the good luck to see. How I wished I had five miles to carry her instead of one!

She opened her eyes. "I have not told you my name yet." I smiled to myself. What difference could her name make to me?

My God! what was she saying?

"It is Edith Garren."

The words seemed to burn into my brain.

I felt giddy and stumbled.

She uttered a cry of pain, and then continuing, said, "I am the only daughter of Major Garren."

I pulled myself together with an effort, and controlled my emotion.

"Edith Garren! Major Garren!"

"I am staying with Mrs. Mavis now, as my father has gone to America."

O Heavens; to think it should come to this. I, David Morton, to be in love with, to have in my arms, to have sworn in my soul to win the daughter of the man who had ruined my father.

How I accomplished the rest of the mile I do not know. But at last I found myself at the gate of Mrs. Mavis's house.

The party had returned, and seeing us coming hastened to the gate. Missing her in the wood they had concluded she had gone back to the house.

But when they returned they were much alarmed by not finding her and were just on the point of setting out again for the woods.

However, our return of course put an end to their anxiety, as far as that was concerned.

I carried her in, properly bandaged her foot, and received the thanks of her hostess, and an invitation to stay to dinner, which I declined. I left, promising to call in the morning and see how the foot was progressing.

On returning home I found I had just time to dress for dinner; so I put off telling my mother until afterwards.

During the meal I tried to argue with and convince myself that I did not care for Edith.

But the more I thought about it, the more certain I was that I should never again care for a woman.

Then, reasoning that it was no use informing my mother about it unless I told her everything, and knowing the effect my information would have on her, I determined to keep it to myself.

I never slept for a moment during the night, and before daylight arose, dressed myself and went outside.

My steps seemed drawn towards the scene of yesterday's adventure, and lighting a cigar, I strolled in that direction.

Entering the wood, I continued walking, not knowing exactly in what direction I was going. As the first rays of the sun appeared in the east I found myself near the brook where I had gone to wet my handkerchief the evening before, and knowing that I could not be far from the spot where I had discovered Edith (I already surprised myself calling her by her christian name), I proceeded to look for it.

Following the stream, I came to the place where I had wet the handkerchief, and tracing my footsteps had no difficulty in finding the exact spot.

The first thing that attracted my attention was the little boot I had cut off her foot; near it was a piece of paper. I picked it up, opened it and found it was a letter from Major Garren to Edith, commencing—"My dear Child."

From the number of terms of endearment used

I could plainly see that he was passionately fond of his daughter.

It ended by telling her he expected to be in England again in some months. It also contained a postscript, running—"Have you come across a Dr. Morton, I hear there is one in Kent?"

I sat down on the bank and was soon lost in thought; suddenly an idea struck me: "What greater revenge could I have than to rob this man of his only child?"

I returned home.

After breakfast I proceeded to visit my patient. On my arrival I was warmly greeted by Mrs. Mavis and shown into the drawing-room, where Edith was lying on the sofa.

She seemed pleased to see me, and blushed very much whilst thanking me for my exertions on her behalf, little knowing how much pleasure my services had given me.

Her ankle was very much swollen, and to my satisfaction I saw in it means of visiting her for some time.

During our conversation Edith remarked:—

"I think papa must have known your father, Dr. Morton, for in his last letter he asks me if I had met you." "It is very probable," I replied. "I have an indistinct recollection of his occasionally visiting us when we were at Peckham."

They asked me to stay to lunch. I did so, and made myself as agreeable as possible.

Day after day I continued my visits until I could find no reasonable pretext for coming so constantly—Edith's ankle having been well some time.

At the end of about two months I proposed to her, and she accepted me.

My mother, who knew nothing about Edith, had to be told.

She was astonished, and at first would not believe that I had engaged myself to the daughter of my father's murderer, as she persisted in calling him.

But after meeting Edith, and I having explained to her that it would be a great punishment to Garren for his only daughter to marry the son of the man he had killed by his treachery, she at last looked at it from the same point of view as myself.

Edith wrote to her father, informing him of our engagement.

But, resolving that nothing should thwart me in my object, I bribed one of the servants to get me the letter, for I knew if he heard we were engaged he would be over by the next boat, and I should lose her.

This I determined should not happen if it was in my power to stop it.

The marriage was hurried on, and four months after our engagement we were married quietly. We went to London for our honeymoon and stayed there three weeks.

Those three weeks remain the one bright oasis in a life of misery.

We returned to Kent and lived in the same house as my mother.

Edith wrote to America, telling her father of our marriage, and trusting soon to see him. I did not think he would come, and I was right.

We waited impatiently for a reply, but none came.

Some time after we received a communication from Major Garren's solicitor, informing us of his death, and that in consequence of his daughter marrying me he had left all his money to charities.

For eight months I was happy, then misfortune came.

My wife died in giving birth to a son.

Three days later the baby died.

I was distracted.

I had brain fever, and was ill six months.

At the end of that time I was again able to move about, the shadow of my former self, thin and weakened by my illness.

My mother took me to the seaside, where we

stayed six months. Then I returned to my practice.

But my misfortunes had not yet ceased—sixteen months after my return, my mother (who had always been delicate,) died of consumption.

So that in a little more than two years I lost all I cared for in the world.

By my mother's death, I came into five hundred a year, irrespective of my practice.

I could not bear to live amongst the scenes of my great happiness and greater losses, so I determined to travel, and try if fresh places and new faces could not assuage a little of my misery.

CHAPTER III.

ACCORDINGLY, I sold my practice, and three months after my mother's death, to be exact, on the second of December, 1882, I went on board the steamer to cross to Havre, and half-an-hour later, saw the cliffs of Dover fading from my sight.

We had a miserable passage across.

Havre is about the most cheerful of all the many Norman seaports, and its surrounding heights, its people dressed in quaint costumes, and busy quays and cafés, make it hard to believe it is only about six hours' journey from England.

I engaged a valet, and amused myself for about a month by making excursions by sea to the numerous Norman watering-places.

I then went to Dieppe, and travelling through St. Valery, Fecamp, etc., came back to Havre, and from there by way of Rouen up the lovely Valley of the Seine, to Paris.

Here I arrived about two months after leaving London.

The route is full of charm at every step, and makes the journey as attractive as that by Calais is uninteresting.

Staying for two months in Paris, I then went to Lyons, then to Switzerland, and stayed for a little while at Turin; from there to Parma, Modena, Florence, and Rome, where I stayed a few weeks.

From Rome, I took boat to Civita Vecchia, and from there went to Naples, where I determined to rest.

For some time I amused myself making excursions to all the places of interest; but growing tired, decided to cross to Ischia, and spend the summer on the island.

Boats leave twice a day for Procida and Ischia, and though they only take two and a half hours doing the trip, in fine weather it is delightful.

On the 21st of May, 1883, I went on board, and fifteen minutes later left the quay.

It was a lovely day, the rays of the sun tempered by a delicious breeze blowing across the bay.

We skirted the waterside of the bay of Pointa di Posilipo, then crossed the entrance to the Gulf of Pozzuoli.

The scenery is magnificent; we could see over Pozzuoli, Nisida, Baiæ, etc., and rounding the Capo di Misero, reached the Marina di Misero at the foot of its picturesque castle.

I left the steamer at the beach of Marina di Santa Maria, and, having procured a cart for my luggage, journeyed by the road which traverses the island from north to south to the little Bay of Chiaioceola, whence I again took boat for the town of Ischia.

Before I proceed, let me pause for a few moments and describe this most beautiful island of the Bay of Naples.

Ischia, known to the ancients as Pithecusa, Ænaria, and Inarimi, is the largest island in the vicinity of Naples, and is distant from it about twenty miles.

Its circumference is twenty miles, the widest part about four miles, and its breadth five and a half.

Its population numbers about 24,000.

Before Vesuvius resumed activity in the first century of our era, Ischia was the principal centre of volcanic action in South Italy.

Monte Epopeo, the Epopos of the Greek and Epopeus of the Latin poets, is near the centre of the island.

There is no trace of lava near the summit, and the volcano seems to have acted chiefly by lateral eruptions.

Several volcanic rents can be distinctly traced in its flanks and in many parts of its declivities.

The north and west portions of the island slope gradually down to the sea, whilst the south and east plunging into it form abrupt and lofty precipices.

Ischia is associated with volcanic action from an early period, and the mythology of the ancients connected with these phenomena has invested the island with a charm peculiarly its own.

About the time of the foundation of Cumæ a Greek colony from Chalcis and Erythrea settled in the island.

Their prosperity for a time was great, but they

had to leave on account of the constant earthquake and volcanic action.

Finally they settled on the opposite coast of Cumæ.

Tunæus mentions them, and records a tradition that shortly before his time (he lived about 262 B.C.) Monte Epomeo vomited forth fire and ashes, and that the land between it and the coast was forcibly cast into the sea, which receded three stadias, and returning overflowed the island and quenched the fire.

These occurrences are also recounted by Pliny, though his version of them differs from that given by Tunæus.

He says that Epomeo vomited forth flames.

That by one of the earthquakes accompanying the eruption a marsh was created, and that Procida was detached by another.

In 1302 one eruption took place, and a stream of lava issued from the north-east base of Monte Epomeo and flowed into the sea near the town of Ischia.

The ancient name Pithecusa was most likely derived by the Roman poets from *Πιθηκος* because the island was said to be inhabited by monkeys.

It has a beautiful climate, and its convenient situation has attracted numerous visitors in all ages.

Cool breezes from the sea make the hottest season delightful.

Its beautiful hills and vales, rugged rocks, barren mountains, and fruitful plains are interspersed one with the other in the most romantic confusion.

Bishop Berkely in a letter to Pope in 1717, says,—"The island Inarimi is an epitome of the whole earth contained in a compass of eighteen miles."

Wheat and Indian corn are grown in the vales, but fruit trees cover most part of the cultivated land. Apricots, peaches, oranges, lemons, pomegranates, figs, water melons, and numerous other fruits flourish amazingly.

Vines and chestnut groves cover some of the hills; others are covered with myrtle, and other natural growths.

Mons Epomeus is the principal feature in the landscape. Near the bottom it is covered with vines; higher up, it affords pastures for flocks of sheep and goats.

On the top, its pointed sandy neck gives one of the finest prospects in the world.

From it, on a clear day, you behold a tract of about 300 miles of Italy, from the Promontory of Antium to the Cape of Palenmus.

This was the delightful spot in which I proposed

to spend a few months and try to forget some of my misery.

Lucky for us poor mortals that we cannot foretell what the future has in store for us—but I am anticipating.

I made Casamicciola my headquarters, and renting a comfortable cottage, installed myself in it with my valet, and one servant to do my cooking.

I fitted myself up a laboratory, and in it amused myself, when tired of making excursions in or around the island.

CHAPTER IV.

ONE day, while standing outside the principal hotel, I saw an Indian with a basket on his back making his way towards me.

He stopped, placed the basket on the ground, drew out a small whistle, and commenced to play a monotonous air.

Presently I saw the lid of the basket move, and protruding from under it, the heads of several snakes; the music became quicker, and forth glided five cobra-di-capellas.

I had never seen anything like this before, it fascinated me.

I could not take my eyes off the rapid movements of the reptiles.

I approached the man and asked him if the snakes still had their fangs.

He could not understand me at first, but after some little trouble, he comprehended ; and showing his white teeth, nodded his head.

Here was something to while away many an hour.

Why not try and discover an antidote to the bite of this most deadly of all snakes ?

I at once resolved to try and buy the snakes.

Pointing to them, and then to myself, I took out a handful of silver and offered it to him.

He shook his head, but, understanding what I wished to do, put both his hands together evidently wishing me to double the amount I had offered.

Having done so, I gave it to him, and signalled for him to lift up the basket—into which the snakes had glided when he had stopped the music—and follow me.

When we arrived at my home, I procured five large earthenware jars, into which I made him put the snakes, and covered the opening with some fine wire netting until I could get some proper cages made for my new pets.

The Indian then left, explaining by signs, that they were to be fed on mice, small birds, and flies.

I went out and found a man to make me the cages, then returned to think out my new idea. Why should I not be the man to find an antidote?

I remembered having heard of one or two cases in which men had boasted of finding it and lost their lives in consequence of experimenting upon themselves.

But, in my case, if I should have the luck to find one, I would take all precautions by first experimenting on dogs, cats, or any other animal I could procure, until I felt confident it was infallible.

And then—

Well, if I could not get any one else to perform on I would test it on myself.

If it did prove fatal it would not matter. I had no particular object in living.

Everyone I cared for was dead; and there was no soul to whom my death could cause a moment's pain.

And if after death I still had the power of reasoning, I would have the satisfaction of knowing I had died like better men before me, in the cause of science.

But now, perhaps, after all, the snakes' fangs

had been extracted—the Indian might have played me false.

I determined to find out.

How should I prove it? A fowl; the very thing.

Accordingly, I rang for my valet, and requested him to go out and buy me a live fowl.

He looked at me for a moment, but being a well trained servant, asked no questions, but departed on his errand, and returned in a little while with the fowl.

I took it into the laboratory where I had the snakes, and allowed one of them to bite it.

Then placing it in a box, I lighted a cigar and went for a short stroll.

On entering in about a half-an-hour I opened the door, and found the fowl dead.

So far satisfactory.

The next thing to do was to discover the antidote.

I proceeded systematically to work.

First I eagerly devoured every book I could find that in any way related to poisons.

And then, having killed one of the snakes, extracted its poison bags, carefully analysed the contents, and compared it with other poisons.

I bought up all the stray dogs and cats.

And the report getting about, my door was besieged of a morning with a crowd of youngsters, leading by pieces of string or carrying in their arms miserable dogs, and still more miserable cats, that they were quite ready to sacrifice for a small coin.

I thus had no difficulty in procuring subjects to practice upon.

Every day saw dead bodies carried from the laboratory, or the small room I had rented near it, and in which my wretched victims awaited their turn, or passed their last moments.

I worked with enthusiasm for about a month, and then, to my great delight, discovered what I was in search of.

Opening the door one morning as I was going for a walk, I found standing outside a dog that had been sent away for dead a week before.

It astonished me.

I took him inside and examined him.

Yes! there could be no doubt of it, the marks of the snake's fangs were still on his leg.

Here at last was a chance to make a name.

After experimenting some time on my animals, I was convinced the antidote was reliable.

The quantity of antidote being proportioned to the strength of each animal, I found, by admin-

istering large or small doses, I could keep my subjects under the influence of the poison for a greater or lesser period.

In two or three cases, when I could not detect the slightest action of the heart, or respiration, and the limbs were perfectly cold, they recovered in from twelve to thirty hours if left alone.

And though they at first could not use their limbs much, in a few hours they regained control over them, and seemed no worse for the experience they had undergone.

The next step, and final one, was to find a man willing to be experimented on.

Though I offered a large sum, I could not get one to take the risk. So I determined to test it on myself.

CHAPTER V.

I CAREFULLY calculated the strength of the human powers of resisting poisons, and compared it to that possessed by animals, and found that from the curious nature of the antidote it might take longer to work its effect on a man than an animal.

I then wrote a letter to my valet requesting him to procure a certain doctor (a friend of mine) and to be sure I was dead before burying me, also to see that my body was kept as long as possible.

My coffin was to be made of very thin light wood, and holes were to be bored in the end where my head would be.

And finally I was to be buried in a vault, the letter stating where to find money to buy one.

To make doubly certain that my instructions should be carried out, I also wrote to the doctor setting forth what they were.

I then sent one letter to him, and placed the other in a prominent position on the mantelpiece so that it could not fail to attract attention.

After carefully preparing the antidote, on the 13th of July, I allowed one of the cobras to bite me on the arm. Thirty seconds afterwards I swallowed the antidote and walked rapidly up and down the room to promote circulation.

After a few moments the room seemed to move round, and I felt a great inclination to sleep.

For some minutes I succeeded in combating this desire, and then my legs gave way beneath me and I fell on the floor in a paralysed state.

A state in which I had not the power to move a muscle; my sight was gone, only my brain and powers of hearing remained active.

I felt as if descending into chasms, lower and lower, depth below depth, and then seemed to rise again.

My brain became perfectly clear.

I comprehended where I was and reckoned my chances.

How awful were the thoughts that possessed me.

Supposing that I had made a mistake in the quantity of antidote?

If they found me like this and buried me!

Perhaps this was death, and the dead know all that is done to them—even to being buried without the power of moving.

I remembered cases I had read of premature burial, of persons having been found turned in their coffins, their hair dragged out, and the nails dug into their skin, showing how terrible the awakening must have been.

Now that I was on the point of death, perhaps dead, I had no wish to die.

Life seemed all that was beautiful; the grave horrible, repulsive, awful.

I had no idea of time; space swelled and was amplified to an extent of unutterable infinity.

I seemed to have been in this state for years.

My valet knocked at the door, and receiving no answer he opened it.

Seeing me on the floor, he screamed, and the other servant came in.

I could hear them talking. They carried me to my bedroom, placed me on a bed, and one of them went for a doctor.

He came, and pronounced me dead.

Whilst he was with me, my valet came into the room with the letter, showed it to him, and they discussed its contents.

The doctor, who, by-the-bye, was not my friend, remarked that I must have been mad, that it was a pity I had been so foolish, and left, promising to send an undertaker to measure me for my coffin.

The servants washed me, and laid me out; all this I knew without being able to feel it, or make the slightest movement; then, covering me up, they left me.

The undertaker came and measured me for my coffin.

I heard my valet giving my instructions to him respecting the make of it, and purchase of the vault.

He undertook to make the coffin as directed.

My valet went to my bureau. I could hear the chink of money as he removed it from the drawers.

The cook came in and together they ransacked my trunks and boxes, coolly appropriating my jewels and other articles they took a fancy to.

Imagine my feelings? Within a few feet, yet unable to prevent them.

The coffin came, I was placed in it.

They screwed the lid down.

I had no idea of time ; every minute seemed a year of hideous, appalling agony.

Presently, they carried me to the hearse and put me in.

Supposing they had not been able to purchase a vault, and buried me in the ground?

How awful, if this was death, to be in the ground for eternity, and know it !

And yet, how much more horrible if I was still alive and should wake, to die that death, one of the most awful the human mind can conceive !

Again and again I pictured to myself what I should pass through, enclosed within these narrow boards.

How powerfully, with what concentrated efforts of my brain, I willed my limbs to move, but to no purpose !

Only my brain was alive, and in it I suffered more than the agonies of the damned.

Oh ! Why had I not the power to kill my brain, and thus escape this uncertainty ?

Perhaps the brain was the soul, and instead of the soul leaving the body, it remained with it; and by feeling and knowing all the horrors the body was subjected to, suffered for the sins it had committed on earth.

What had I ever done that I should undergo this cruciation?

They placed the coffin on the ground and read the burial service over me.

When it was finished, they lifted the coffin, and carried it to a vault.

Thank God! they were not going to bury me in the earth.

Then they put me on a shelf, and left.

I could hear the iron door slam as they shut and locked it.

I was alone.

How long I remained like this I know not, but suddenly felt as if a single needle had been run in my left side, then as if several pierced my heart.

The pricks extended; it seemed as if innumerable small sharp instruments were being plunged into every portion of my body.

Now and then I felt one of my muscles twitch.

I breathed.

My blood began to circulate, slowly at first, and then more rapidly, traversing my veins like molten lead, and causing excruciating pain.

I moved.

Never shall I forget the supreme ecstasy of that moment.

Again I felt alive.

I tried to call out, but my throat was too dry, and I only succeeded in making a low, husky sound.

Then I thought, supposing, that instead of following my instructions, thinking me mad when I wrote the letter, they had made the coffin of thick wood.

In that case my chances of breaking through were small and I should die in it of starvation.

They had evidently carried out my wishes in respect to boring the holes, as I found no difficulty in breathing, and though the air was heavy with the pestilential odour arising from those bodies from which the coffins had rotted away, I thought I had never inhaled any so delicious.

After a time I moved again, with a little more control over my limbs.

Raising my hands I felt the boards above me and tore the waxed paper, with which the coffin was lined, from my face.

Each time I moved I gained more control over my muscles.

Perspiration oozed from the pores of my skin.

My voice returned to me.

I yelled, struggled, and beat the boards above me without making any impression on them.

I stopped for a moment, then, with the strength of despair, drew my knees up as far as I could.

The board cracked.

Again and again did I exert my utmost strength, until at last with a mighty effort I succeeded in splitting it, and with the force of my movement rolled off the shelf on to the floor, bringing the coffin with me.

Exhausted nature gave way.

I fainted.

On recovering consciousness I could see nothing; total darkness environed me.

Crawling to the side of the vault I tried to discover the door, but without success.

Becoming calm I started to walk round the vault, in my course knocking down the coffins with which it was lined.

I could hear the bones of the skeletons rattle, and the thud of more recent corpses that fell from the coffins, as they broke on the floor.

Occasionally I tripped and fell amongst them, and could feel as I put out my hands to save myself, their dried skin and bones, or rotten flesh.

The stench emanating from them was awful.

I sat down on a coffin to rest myself.

Scenes and incidents, long forgotten, paraded before me in the darkness.

Scenes that I should not have known were connected with myself but for the strange incidents that led up to them in the exact manner in which they had occurred, and explained them with such distinctness, that my mind was forced to grasp and to recognise them instantaneously.

Surely there could be no greater hell to a bad man than his conscience; and if we accept the belief that the soul does not perish, and has the power of thought, we at once create a hell far more terrible than mere bodily suffering.

I remembered a passage of De Quincey's in which he says:—

“I feel assured there is no such thing as forgetting possible to the mind; a thousand accidents may and will interpose a veil between our present consciousness and the secret inscriptions on the mind; accidents of the same sort will also rend away the veil; but alike whether veiled or unveiled, the inscription remains for ever; just as the stars seem to withdraw before the common light of day, when as, in fact, we all know that it is the light that is drawn over them as a veil, and that they are waiting to be revealed when the obscuring daylight shall be withdrawn.”

These, and a thousand other anxious speculations crowded my brain.

The tension was so great that I felt that something was on the point of snapping and that I should go mad.

Arising, I again commenced to pace the vault. I found it was about 30ft. wide by almost 20ft. in breadth; near the sides my head sometimes touched the roof; this led me to think that it had been formed out of a natural cavern.

It might be one of a succession of caverns, and divided from others by, perhaps, only a few inches of dirt or stone.

I picked up a large bone and commenced to tap the sides, as I walked round.

After making the circuit of the cave several times, I noticed, that at one corner, the wall had a hollow sound.

I struck it again.

Yes! there could be no doubt the sound was different from that given by other parts.

The hollowness extended for about three feet in each direction.

I felt reanimated, and set to work with the bone to try and pierce the wall.

The bone was too short, and I had to tear part of the earth, near the hole, away, to let me get my arm in.

Indescribable joy !

The bone passed through, and a current of cool, fresh air played on my face, wet with sweat, caused by my exertions and the suspense I had undergone.

The air, after that of the vault, was like a draught of fresh water to me, and revived my shattered energies amazingly.

With renewed strength I tore at the hole until I had made an opening large enough to get through.

What horrors might I not meet on the other side ? But anything was better than the vault with its hideous corpses, so I knelt down and crawled into the hole.

I put my hands out but could feel nothing.

What was I to do ? Return to the vault ?

Never ! I would rather die than return to that fearful stench.

The thought flashed through my mind—why not kill myself ?

Anything was better than this awful darkness.

I crawled through and hung on to the side of the hole, then muttering a prayer, let go my hold.

For a second I was in the air, then, I touched the ground, and felt myself rolling down and down a steep incline.

Something hit me on the head and I became unconscious.

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN I regained consciousness, I found myself lying on the ground, near a bed of enormous fungi that emitted a strange phosphorescent light.

By its aid I saw I was in a large cave, of what extent I could form no idea.

Irregular masses of lava, pumice stone, rocks, and many colored crystals, composed the walls, which rose sheer from the ground until lost in the appalling darkness overhead.

The ground was covered with broken fragments of the same composition as the walls.

The crystals shining from the walls and strewn on the ground, reflected the phosphorescent light given out by the fungi, and showed to my horrified gaze numbers of enormous reptiles, gliding, wriggling, and struggling in repulsive masses on the ground.

I withdrew my gaze, shuddering, and looked

upwards ; here my eyes were met with sights even more hideous.

Huge bluish white birds, with enormous eyes and crooked beaks a foot long, sat on the rocks projecting from the sides, or with hoarse cries flapped from crag to crag.

Every now and then, uttering a shrill note, one of them would leave its perch, swoop to the ground, pick up a serpent and fly with it, hissing and writhing in its beak into the darkness above me.

All round me were beds of phosphorescent fungi, and by their weird light I was able to perceive these horrible sights.

On the ground, black liquid formed repulsive looking pools, into which, every now and then, with a hiss, a snake would plunge, and disappear.

My horror was absorbed in sheer amazement for some time.

Then, came a revulsion of feeling, swallowing up the astonishment, and leaving me trembling, in terror, wondering what I should next see.

In the vault I had been possessed by spiritual and moral terrors.

Here it was different.

Material ones, in the shape of these horrid birds, and still more horrid snakes, were the agents.

Around, over all, brooded a sense of everlastingness and infinity that deepened into and left on me an oppression as of madness.

Was I dead?

Was this hell?

Could these awful phosphorescent creatures be real?

My aching limbs left me in no doubt as to my being alive, and a serpent, gliding over my legs, causing me to shudder, made me realise it was no phantom of my brain.

I lay for some time trying to grasp my situation, and wondering how I came to be here.

Then I remembered having resolved to kill myself, and casting myself into the black abyss.

I must have fainted, for suddenly I was aroused by a feeling of horror; something had brushed across my face.

Opening my eyes, for a moment I thought it was a snake.

Then by the light, which it threw out as it came towards me, I saw it was one of the huge birds swooping to where I lay.

I picked up a stone, and waited until it was within a few feet.

Then threw it with what little strength I had.

Luckily my aim was straight.

The stone struck the bird on the wing; it fell,

shrieking in the most horrible manner, and beating the ground with its unwounded wing, caused the snakes near to scatter in all directions, and woke the cave with a thousand echoes.

Its cries brought hundreds of its mates, who, after flying and shrieking around it for some time, finally fell upon it, and tearing it to pieces devoured it before my eyes.

I shuddered; perhaps my turn would come next.

But the horrors were not over; worse had still to come.

No sooner had the birds returned to roost on the crags and rocks, than, turning my eyes in another direction, I saw a light that seemed to be approaching.

At first it looked like a star, but, as it came nearer, it gradually assumed larger and larger proportions, until for a quarter of a mile the cavern was lighted up by its brilliancy.

At first my eyes were so blinded by its strength that I could see nothing.

When they became more used to it, I was able to comprehend in some degree what an enormous size the cavern I was in must be (allowing it to be a cavern). I was lying in a corner, and could see the two walls stretching away on each side for some hundreds of yards, and yet there seemed no end to them.

I could discern no roof, though I could see for a great height overhead.

The walls towered up and were lost in darkness. More and more brilliant became the light.

At last I saw it was caused by the approach of hundreds of hideous, awful, terrible-looking creatures, who, as they moved, lighted up all around them for some distance by the same peculiar phosphorescent light I had noticed emanating from the birds and fungi.

Fear took possession of me ; I trembled.

I must be dreaming.

I pinched myself, and rubbed my eyes.

What were these awful monsters ?

My last moments had evidently come ; they would find and kill me.

When within about two hundred yards they stopped for a second or two, then going to a bed of fungi, commenced to pull it up and eat it.

While they were thus engaged, I had an opportunity to observe their strange movements and shapes.

Let me try and describe them.

In height, about half of them were five feet ; the rest, not more than four.

These latter I took to be the females.

They were something like the cynocephali or baboons in general appearance.

But, when I carefully looked at them, I saw that though they possessed some of the characteristics, of baboons, they had others totally different.

The one in which they most differed from monkeys, was that they stood perfectly erect, and walked like human beings.

Their legs were perfectly white, with no hair.

Their heads were small, out of proportion to their bodies, and set in level with their shoulders, apparently without any neck.

Their eyes were large and almond-shaped.

Their foreheads retreating like a baboon's, their under jaws very prominent, with mobile lips which they moved about in the strangest manner as they talked to each other.

As they opened their mouths to bite the fungi, I saw rows of strong white teeth.

The noses of some of them were not like a baboon's, but were set between their eyes, in others, they resembled that of a dog.

I could hear the gnashing of their teeth as they chewed the fungi.

From the neck to below their loins they were covered with long, lank, coarse, bluish-white hair, from beneath which their thin, white legs extended.

Their arms were long and sinewy, reaching nearly to the ground like those of a baboon, and

covered with hair much finer than that on the body.

Some had short, rudimentary tails; others none.

One seemed to be the leader, and directed their movements.

He was a great deal more human-looking than the rest, and for a moment, on first seeing him, I thought he was a European.

His legs were much fatter than those of the others; his arms much shorter, with hardly any hair on; his head set better on his shoulders, with much smaller ears, and covered with short fine hair.

In fact he did not look much worse than many men I have occasionally seen bathing, except for his head, which had the retreating forehead and projecting under jaw of an ape.

After they had eaten for some time he called out something, I could not hear what, but it sounded like bad Latin.

All the rest immediately stopped eating and gathered round him.

He took a number of strange looking nets from two or three of the creatures and distributed them amongst the others.

At once returning to the fungi bed they proceeded to fill them with the fungi.

Several of them came near to where I was lying.

What could I do?

If I moved they would see me.

And directly they did would most likely tear me to a thousand pieces.

They came to where the birds had killed their mate, and saw its feathers and blood lying about.

Giving a shrill note like that of anger, they rushed back to where the leader of the party was standing, the others collected on hearing the cry, and all started gesticulating and making a frightful noise at the same time.

What would they do?

After a few moments they became calmer and quieter, and were evidently listening to the one I had noticed directing them, and whom I distinguished by the different sound of his voice.

When he had finished, they advanced in a body to where the bird had been killed and carefully examined the ground.

While they were thus engaged one of them gave a most awful human-like shriek of agony and fell down.

Looking in that direction, I saw one of the enormous reptiles gliding away from where the wretched creature was.

The others all got out of the way of the snake, and then clustered round the wounded one, who lay still, moaning in the most piteous manner; but not attempting to do anything.

Presently he tried to get up and succeeded in standing on his legs for a moment; then fell back again in convulsions—froth and blood issuing from his mouth.

I at once knew there was no hope for him.

In a few minutes he expired.

Some of the smaller creatures—who I thought were females—set up a most awful wailing.

This considerably strengthened my opinion as to their sex, for females, as a rule, never neglect an opportunity of making as much noise as they can.

The other and larger creatures seemed to take the matter very coolly, as if they were used to it.

They lifted their dead comrade to the side of one of the black looking pools and laid him down.

Then they pulled a lot of white creepers that grew among the fungi, and tying some stones to his body, pushed him into the water.

Then, as if nothing unusual had happened, they returned to the spot where the bird had been killed, and proceeded to hunt about as if looking for something.

For some time they continued examining the ground, then one, coming quite close, saw me, and uttered a yell.

CHAPTER VII.

THEY all clustered round, and seeing me, raised a dreadful clamour.

Each second I expected them to fall on me and kill me, but they simply stood howling.

In a few moments the leader stepped from the rest, and advancing close to me—to my utmost astonishment—said some words. At first I could not understand, then I made out he was speaking in bastard Latin and meant "*Unde venis,*" "Where do you come from?" I replied in the best Latin I could muster, "*Ex terra superna,*" "From above this place."

He then said, "*quid facis,*" "What are you doing here?" I replied "*cecidi,*" "I have fallen down."

Directly he had finished, the others, who had remained quite quiet during this conversation, commenced to jabber all at once.

I could not understand what they were saying; but, as they first pointed at me and then at the pool wherein they had thrown the body, I had no difficulty in arriving at the conclusion, that they were discussing whether they should drown me or not.

Most of them seemed in favour of my death and some advanced towards me.

I was perfectly powerless against so many, in fact one could have managed me in my weak state.

So, knowing resistance was hopeless, I remained perfectly quiet, consoling myself with the reflection that if I was to die I could not help it.

Just as they were going to seize me one of the smaller ones ran between.

This gave me a respite for a moment.

Immediately others joined her, and by their noise and gesticulations evidently begged the males to spare me.

This they seemed in no mood to do.

Every moment I expected them to push aside my protectors and put an end to me.

The leader, who all this time had remained inactive, seeing they were divided in opinion concerning whether I was to live or die, now approached the disputants and signalled for the larger ones to move back.

This they did, uttering the while savage cries at being disappointed of their prey.

Turning to them he jabbered for some time, and at last they were apparently satisfied.

He next directed his attention to me, and in the bastard Latin he had used before said, "*surge,*"

"get up." I pointed to my legs and shaking my head replied, "*non possum*," "I cannot."

He evidently comprehended, for he at once beckoned to six of the others, who walked towards me, as I thought to kill me.

Two lifted me under the shoulders, two took my legs, and two clasped each other's hands under my back.

I felt a horrible sensation of repulsion as they touched me, but as I could do nothing I lay still.

The one, who had spoken, sent some of them in front, for what reason I could not at first make out, but after a time I saw it was to drive away the snakes.

He walked after them in the space they cleared, then came those carrying me, then the smaller, and lastly the larger creatures bearing on their backs the nets filled with fungi.

In this way we traversed part of the cave, occasionally passing beds of fungi, and seeing in the distance patches of light caused by them.

They were of a smaller kind than those near where I had been lying, and the further we proceeded the smaller they became.

Overhead I now and then saw flashes of light shooting like rockets across the darkness, caused by the birds flying from one part of the cave to another.

Soon the beds of fungi disappeared, and, but for the wonderful phosphorescent light emanating from the bodies of the creatures who were with me, and lighting up everything for some distance around us, we would have been in total darkness.

My companions seemed to be very much afraid of snakes, and after seeing their fellow's death I was not surprised.

Whenever they came across a snake (and that was very often), they uttered cries of fright and got out of its way as quickly as possible.

After some time we came to a deep fissure, and putting me on the ground they talked amongst themselves for a while, evidently trying to devise a means of getting me across.

It was plain they did not intend to kill me at once, or they would not have taken the trouble to carry me carefully all this distance.

They had brought me along so gently that I began to lose a little of my former horror of them.

I looked into the gap before me and shuddered, "How would they ever cross it with me?"

I was not left long in doubt.

The fissure was about five feet wide, and I should have thought nothing of jumping it had I been strong; but in my present condition I could not walk, much less make a jump.

My companions had evidently decided on a way to accomplish my passage.

About twelve of them jumped to the other side, then two of the largest lay down at right angles to the edge of the crevice side by side.

The others held on to one another in two long strings, the foremost ones holding the legs of those lying down. Those on the side where I was did likewise. The two on each side now stretched their long arms across the opening until they touched one another, then drawing themselves close together put their arms around each other's bodies.

Thus they formed a living bridge.

My bearers instantly lifted me up and carried me, trembling with fear, on to the backs of their companions.

In a few seconds I was safely landed on the other side.

They then let go in the centre and were safely pulled back to their respective sides.

Those on the opposite side now jumped across; and we again set out, I knew not where.

On this side of the fissure, I noticed there were no snakes, or fungi; and very few birds.

Presently we came to another fissure of larger size than the former one.

At an enormous distance down, I could hear the

sound of water, as it rushed and roared over its narrow, rocky bed.

We followed this opening for some time until we came to a place small enough to form a bridge.

After going through the same performance as at the first opening, I was safely landed on the other side, and we proceeded as before.

As I was borne along I made a thousand conjectures concerning these strange creatures.

They were evidently not monkeys, for they had the power of speech.

Certainly not men; as some of them had short tails.

What could they be?

Suddenly Darwin's theory flashed through my mind.

Yes! Undoubtedly they were the missing link.

But, how account for the phosphorescent light they emitted?

This, I reasoned, might be the effect of the fungi they fed on, the essence of which, having thoroughly impregnated their bodies, passed through the pores of their skin.

Whether this was possible I could not say, but it was the only way I could account for it.

Reasoning thus, I lost a great deal of the fear that had at first possessed me, and observed my captors with increased interest.

How was it they had never been discovered before?

Why was it left for me in the nineteenth century to prove what the cleverest men could only theorize about.

Should I ever get out of this awful place and be able to give my discovery to the world?

These and a thousand other thoughts passed through my head.

During my cogitations I had shut my eyes; on opening them I found we had arrived at an opening in the rocky wall.

The leader entered it, my bearers followed, and then came the rest. On entering it I saw it was a passage about twenty feet wide.

The walls, as in the other cave, were composed of rock, glistening with crystals, but here they were smooth and seemed to be rather the work of hands than of nature.

The floor was covered with fine white sand—the height of the walls was about ten or twelve feet.

We traversed this passage for about a mile, then I perceived we were approaching a light.

This I fancied was the mouth of the passage, and wondered if the light was caused by the rays of the sun.

At last we arrived at the opening and I saw an-

other amazing sight—a cave similar to the one we had left but of medium size, was before me.

But, unlike the other, this was perfectly light.

This was the light I had noticed shining at the end of the passage, and was caused by some hundreds of the same strange creatures as were with me.

The cave, like the floor of the passage, was covered with fine, white sand, and on it lay or played about amongst the rocks at the side, numbers of these wonderful monstrosities.

Amongst them I noticed several who looked even more human than the leader of the ones I was with.

On seeing us they at once left off their antics, and came towards us.

When they beheld me they gave vent to screams, whether of joy or anger I could not decide, and several at once rushed away.

Soon they returned.

In front of them walked one who looked quite as the heads of those with me.

human, except for its head, and that was as ugly

As it came, the others all stepped aside, and made way for it to approach me.

By its height it was evidently a female, and by the deference shown her she was as evidently of importance.

Her limbs and body were perfectly white and beautifully shaped, ending in hands and feet like those of human beings.

In place of the long coarse hair, covering the bodies of the others, she had very little, and what there was, was very short, thin, white, and silky.

When I looked at her head I shuddered.

It was well set on her white shoulders, but the horrible retreating forehead, deep sunken eyes, longish ears and protruding underjaw (all, like her body, covered with short, silky hair), gave her an even more awful appearance than those who most resembled baboons.

The leader advanced to meet her.

They conversed for some time in bastard Latin.

I could make out a few words here and there, and understood he was giving her an account of finding me in the "cave of serpents" (as he called it), about the snake killing their mate, and also about the death of the bird.

I gathered that the bird was held sacred on account of its killing the snakes, of which these creatures were in great terror.

He accused me of having been the cause of its death, and wished her to give him permission to kill me.

This she would not consent to, but came up to

where I was lying. Touching me with her hand, she said in Latin :

"Why did you kill it?" I explained to her as well as I was able that it had first attacked me while asleep, and tried to kill me, that picking up a stone I had thrown it and hit the bird, which was wounded.

That the others, seeing one of their number on the ground, at once came around it, and ended by tearing it to pieces and devouring it.

She called the leader, and explained that the motive of my act was only self-defence.

And that in reality the birds had killed their mate.

Then pointing to me she said, "*Hic ferti*," bring him here."

CHAPTER VIII.

LIFTING me they carried me through the cave into another one.

The light in this cave was intense, caused by heaps of fungi piled up against the walls, and was evidently their store-room.

Next we entered one of smaller dimensions.

On the sandy floor were small heaps of bluish white hair, resembling that on their bodies, but emitting no light.

This seemed to be a sleeping apartment, and the heaps of hair beds.

Here they stopped, and laying me on one of the heaps left the cave, the white female alone remaining.

She seated herself on some hair near me, and looked at me with interest.

I lay back, wondering what would next happen.

She gave a sharp cry, startling me considerably. One of the smaller creatures appeared at the entrance.

She said something to her—I could not catch the words—and she at once disappeared, returning shortly, carrying in her hands a piece of hollow lava containing some water.

This she placed near me, and left the cave.

The white female then addressed me, and said in Latin—"Wash your wounds."

(In future I shall translate their bastard Latin—as near the literal meaning as I can, and merely give the English.)

I felt some slight embarrassment in doing as she made me before her, she looked so human.

But as she made no movement it was plain she did not intend to go.

I had been buried in a suit of my pyjamas.

So, removing the coat, I examined myself and found I was very much bruised and cut about the chest and shoulders from my fall, and covered with blood.

So I proceeded to wash it away.

Whilst I was doing so, she advanced to where I was, and, touching my shoulder, said "*beautiful.*"

The situation was becoming critical, so I hurried on my coat and sat down again.

When I had done so, she uttered another cry, and the servant (for such she undoubtedly was) appeared at the opening as before.

The white female uttered something and the servant disappeared, soon appearing again, this time with some fungi.

Placing them on the ground, she retired.

The white female handed me a piece, and taking some herself began to eat it.

I hesitated to follow her example, and she, noticing my uncertainty, seemed surprised, and said "eat."

I felt very faint and hungry, so, without hesitating any longer, took a bite and chewed it.

The taste was by no means unpleasant, and

somewhat resembled that of a raw mushroom, but was rather nicer.

I finished the piece I had, and took another.

Each mouthful I relished it more, until by the time I had eaten my third helping I thought I had seldom tasted anything more delicious.

After washing it down with some water I felt considerably refreshed.

The white female, who all this time had also been busily engaged eating, then turned to me and said, "They want me to kill you!"

"Why?" I asked.

"Because you have killed one of the sacred birds," she replied.

Then turning round she tossed some hair all over herself, and quietly went to sleep.

This was very pleasant!!

After escaping all the dangers I had passed through—to be murdered by these creatures for simply killing a hideous bird—which, if I had not done so, would have killed me!

What could I do? Try and escape?

If I did manage to elude them (which I very much doubted the possibility of) I knew not where to go.

The caves would all be dark if the inhabitants were not there, and even if I could find my way back to the one where they had found me, the

vault was the only outlet I knew of, and that with its stench and blackness was worse than death.

So I determined to let events take their course.

Having decided, I commenced to look about me. My eyes first fell on the white female sleeping within a few feet of me.

What an awful monstrosity!

That horrible unsightly head!

By the light her body gave forth, I was able to examine the place we were in.

It was about thirty feet long by about the same width.

The walls were perfectly smooth from ground to roof.

It was some twelve feet above me, and composed of rough rocks, lava, pumice stone, and crystals, the same as the sides of the cave I had first been in.

There was nothing but the heaps of hair in it.

On the walls I saw some curious drawings.

One in particular was the body of a woman, but instead of having the frightful baboon's head, had that of a human being.

The drawing or rather carving was six feet high and originally must have been cut fully an inch into the rock, and seemed to have been done at some very remote date, as in some places I could hardly trace the outline.

The face was in a splendid state of preservation, and there was not the slightest doubt it was meant to represent a human being.

Much I wondered how it could have come to be here.

Who did it?

Surely not the creatures I had seen?

Was it possible that there might be some men or women in this awful place as well as myself?

I determined to ask the white female about it.

Perplexing myself with a thousand things, I fell asleep.

I was awakened by her touching me. Opening my eyes, I saw she had some fungi in her hand, and that a dish of water was on the ground near me.

My sleep had done me good and refreshed me considerably.

I sat up and asked her what she wanted.

"Eat," she said.

While I was doing so, she came near me, and, putting her arms round my neck, bent her head down as I thought to kiss me. I shuddered and drew back. This was more than I could stand.

Yet another passage of De Quincy's flashed through my mind—when he dreamt he was kissed "with the cancerous kisses of crocodiles."

As soon they, as to be saluted by the lips of this fearful creature.

She evidently felt hurt by my repulsion, and when I looked at her I saw tears in her eyes.

Stooping down she picked up a piece of fungus, then going down on her knees held it out to me.

I took it, and not knowing what else to do with it, ate it.

This she evidently understood as a sign of forgiveness, for she bent down and put her mobile lips to my hand.

Then arising she walked out of the cave without speaking.

What would happen next? I was not long kept in doubt.

The creature, who was the leader of those who had found me, entered with six of them and approached me.

He stopped in front of me and said, "come with me."

I got up and followed him; the six others walking behind me. We passed out of the cave into the store-room, and through it into the other.

Here were some hundreds of them evidently awaiting my arrival.

Directly they saw me they set up a cry which nearly deafened me.

I could not see the white female, and wondered where she was.

What were they going to do with me? The suspense was awful.

The leader turned round and said "follow me."

He led me into an opening in the wall of the cave we were in, and along a passage.

Some distance ahead was a light, looking as if it arose from the ground.

When we came up to it, I found that it did so, and was a small crater some ten feet across. I looked in, the glare from the hot, seething mass at the bottom was blinding.

Were they going to throw me into this?

My blood turned cold with fright. I attempted to retreat from the edge, but found I was completely hedged in by the hideous creatures.

Two advanced from amongst the rest and put their long, sinewy hands on my shoulder, one on each side.

My agony was indescribable. My last moment had evidently come. In a few moments I would be dead—the flesh burnt from off my bones, and my bones charred to ashes.

I tried to struggle but they held me as if in a vice—I could not move.

They dragged me to the side of the crater, lifted me up, and were in the act of throwing me in, when a piercing shriek rent the air.

They paused—and I saw the white female

rushing through the crowd, who opened a passage for her. "Hold!" she cried, "Who told you to kill him? I want him—he must live." As she spoke she pushed aside the two who had hold of me and placed her hand on my arm.

The leader stepped up to her and said, "He has killed one of the sacred birds, the penalty is death."

The crowd greeted his words with yells of applause.

The white female never moved, but when they had stopped, replied,

"The penalty for one of us is death, but he is not one of us, therefore I say he shall live."

The terrible creatures remained silent; she continued—

"I am your Queen, and you chose me for being most like our mother."

"Here is one who is more like her than I am."

"Yet, you would kill him? You shall not; I will take him; he shall be mine, and our young shall rule over you, and each generation shall be more beautiful than the one before." These, as near as I can remember them, were the words uttered by this strange creature.

For a moment after she ceased, they were silent, then they burst into applause.

She took me by the hand and led me through

the crowd who stepped aside and let us pass back to the large cave and from there to the small one.

When we were inside she let go my hand, and throwing herself on a bed of hair, cried bitterly.

When she stopped I thanked her for saving my life.

She looked at me with her deep-set melancholy eyes and said, "Where do you come from?"

I replied, "From outside the earth."

"Where is that?" she asked.

I told her "Outside of here."

She did not understand what outside meant, but, pointing to the figure cut into the wall, she said, "She came from there." I asked, "When?" "I do not know," she answered. "Do you know anything about her?" I asked. "My mother told me about her before she died," she replied. I seated myself on one of the heaps of hair, and asked her to tell me all she knew. This is what she told me, translated as well as I was able from the bastard Latin she spoke in.

CHAPTER IX.

"THIS tradition was told me by my mother.

"She heard it from her mother. My great grandmother had told it to her, and thus it has been handed down from when it occurred to the present time. When that was I am unable to tell you, but it must have been many years ago. Before then we were even more ugly than now. Our legs were of a different shape, we could not stand upright, tails grew behind us, our arms were much longer, ending in hands with fingers nearly all the same length. We were much smaller, and completely covered with long hair.

"We did not live here, but in a place that became light and then dark. There were many thousands of us. An awful time came.

"The earth began to shake.

"Hot stuff like that in the hole they were going to throw you in, poured down the side of the mountain, filling many of the smaller caves and killing a large number of those who had taken shelter in them.

"A few took refuge in these caves and escaped.

"The earth shook for some time.

“Suddenly the roof of the cave in which they were standing opened, and there fell through a creature like you, but with long hair on its head.

“It was covered all over with things it could take off and put on again. It was not hurt, as it had fallen into a pool of water. On its appearance the earth was still again.

“When all was over there were very few of them left, for besides those that had been killed in the burning stuff, numbers had been crushed under the falling rocks.

“They tried to go into the light, but found they were unable to; the earth had covered the place they had come in at.

“They had nothing to eat and wandered about for some time in the dark.

“But at length they found some of those things that give light. They ate them and lived on nothing else. The female (for such they found her to be) cried for a long time. But at length she also ate them.

“One of my ancestors had lost his female during the earth-shaking, so he took her.

“She had some young ones.

“The first was white with the exception of its head—that was like its father—but it could not walk as she did.

"The next was still more like her, could stand erect and had no tail.

"These she taught to make a noise which she understood.

"After having four young ones she died, and they bred amongst themselves and had a number of young ones who also bred white creatures with tails, and all covered with hair.

"They all obeyed the one who was most like the white female.

They could all understand each other as we now do.

"After they had been a long time in the caves in the dark—feeding on the things that gave light—they also lighted up things around them, very little at first, but afterwards the light became stronger.

"A long time elapsed, and then the earth again shook.

"All the original creatures were dead, and there remained only those who had been born since the white female came. These were of many shapes.

"Some of them were like I am; others had tails, some long ones, others short; some could walk erect, others used their hands as well as their legs.

"Some were all covered with hair; some only half covered.

"As time went on they began to degenerate and get more hairy. But all could walk without using their arms.

"Then it was seldom any were born like I am, and those who were the others always obeyed.

"There are none like me now. All have dark hair, and I am afraid there will not be another white one born amongst them. But as time goes on their young ones' young ones will become more and more like what we were before the white female came.

"Even now there are some of us who cannot talk, though they understand those who can.

"And to my sorrow some short time ago I saw a young one with a long tail who used its arms to help it along.

"I had it killed, as I did not wish it to breed, but was certain it will be of no use, as others are sure to be born like it.

"But now I am happy. You, I feel convinced, were sent here to help me.

"Therefore, I have saved your life that you may live with me. Our young ones will again be white. You shall be the head of us—and will save us from again becoming such as we were long ago."

Having finished the tale she came and sat near me. How awful, I thought, to be compelled to live with a monstrosity like this.

Better death.

But, thought I, I do not wish to be killed. I will put her off for a time, and see if I can devise some means of escape from this horrible predicament.

Turning to her I said "What you have told me is really wonderful. Has the roof of the cave never opened since the white female came through? Did it not open the last time it shook?"

"Yes," she replied. "The last time some of them saw a strong light for a little while shining through the roof, but it soon closed and was dark as before."

"Then there is no way out of this cave?" I asked.

"None," she answered.

My last hope was gone. I should have to pass the remainder of my life as the husband of this hideous creature.

I thought of the wife I had lost, and shuddered at the anticipation of having to submit to this monstrosity's embraces.

It was too horrible.

As in a nightmare I saw no way of escaping, except by death.

Yet, poor thing, I pitied her sincerely.

Turning to me she said, "You cannot give any light, so I will tell two of my creatures to stay with you always."

"You shall live in this small cave with me."

She gave a cry.

The servant instantly appeared at the opening. The white female spoke to her. She left, and in a few moments the leader of the fungi gatherers walked in.

She said something to him; he retired, and shortly returned, followed by about a dozen of the horrible male creatures.

Turning to me, she asked which I would have. I picked two of the smallest and weakest.

Touching them, I said "These."

"Good!" she said; then waving her hands to the others, "Go."

They left at once.

The two I had chosen took up positions, one on each side of me.

I determined I would have another look at the place through which I had fallen into the cave, and see if I could not find some means of escaping.

"When do you send to the cave for fungi?" I asked.

"Soon," she replied.

"I should like to go."

"I will come with you," she said.

Feeling very tired, I signified I should like to sleep.

Immediately the two phosphorescent creatures who were my servants put together several heaps of hair. On this I stretched myself, and very soon in my dreams was far away from this horrible place.

I had no way of counting time, so do not know how long I slept; but when I awoke I felt something round my neck, and found it was the arm of the white female, who was lying on the hair beside me.

The two servants had retired to one corner of the cave.

Finding her so close to me, I started.

My movement awakened her.

She removed her arm, at which I felt greatly relieved.

"When are you going to the fungi cave?"

"We will go now," she answered. Rising, she spoke to the servants.

They both left the cave.

Bending down she put her arms round me, and lifting me up, kissed me. I was afraid to utter a cry, in case she might get in a rage and kill me. Her strength was wonderful. She raised me from the ground as if I had been a baby. No words can sufficiently express the revulsion I felt at her caress. But it was no use making a noise. In her embrace I was powerless.

"Let us go at once," I said.

She put me down, and we left the cave together.

Outside, in the large cave, we found all the fungi gatherers waiting.

Sending some of them on to light the way, we set out for the cave of serpents, as they called it. Following the same passage we came by, and crossing the crevices, we found ourselves amongst the fungi.

The snakes were very numerous, and before we had arrived at the large beds, one of the creatures in front gave a cry and fell down. We went up to it, and found it had been bitten; in a few minutes it was dead. They tied some stones to it, and dropped it into a pool as they had done with the others, and then started to fill their nets.

I was stooping down to pick a fungus, when a snake, lying near, threw itself against my hand and buried its fangs in the palm. I uttered a piercing shriek, which brought them all round me. Each moment I expected to die. The screams of the white female led me to believe that she had also been bitten.

She caught hold of my hand, and seeing where the fangs had penetrated, put her mouth to the wound and commenced to suck it.

The others stood round in silence.

Much to my surprise, the bite had no effect on

me, except to make me feel sick and giddy for a few moments.

I soon felt all right again, and told the white female so. Her delight was unbounded.

She threw her arms round my neck, hugged me, and kissed me with great fervour. It was anything but pleasant, but as she had risked her life in sucking the snake bite, I submitted with the best grace I could.

The others were astounded, and murmurs of wonder ran around at my not succumbing to the effects of the poison at once. The reason of its having no effect on me I put down to the cobra bite having inoculated me, and made me poison proof as far as snake bites were concerned. Of course it may have been a non-poisonous snake, but seeing the two creatures die in such a short time, I had every reason to believe it was venomous. After they had filled their nets we started back. Crossing one of the crevices, an accident occurred.

In making the jump, one of the creatures trod too near the edge.

The earth gave way beneath it, and down, down, it went. For two or three seconds there was not a sound, and then we heard the dull thud of the body as it reached the bottom.

The creatures seemed to have no feeling concerning a death, and took no notice of it.

I asked the white female, who was walking near me, why they seemed to care so little, she answered:—

“It occurs so often that they are used to it.”

As we were following the wall of the cave, before we came to the passage, we heard a great noise above us. We rushed from the side just in time to escape an enormous piece of rock that had become loosened and had fallen. We arrived at the passage and cave without any more accidents.

I heard the fungi gatherers recounting how I had been bitten and had not died. All came and looked at me. I had to show them the marks of the fangs in my hand. They were very much astonished, and evidently looked upon me as a supernatural being.

CHAPTER X.

SOME time after this event, the white female commenced to importune me in a most unpleasant manner to live with her.

I could see no way of escape—the crisis had come.

Was I to give up every idea of refinement—degenerate into a brute like these half bestial creatures—have children, and die, with monsters calling me father.

Or should I refuse to accede to her demands and without a doubt be killed? For I was certain she would kill me if I disappointed her.

If only she had a more human face, no matter how ugly, I might have overcome my repugnance.

Her body, arms, and legs were beautifully shaped.

She seemed kind and gentle, and was evidently very fond of me. But that ugly head was ever rising before me in all its awful hideousness. Then again, how horrible to die: probably be thrown into the crater, and in boiling lava be roasted, scalded, burned to nothingness.

Suddenly a thought struck me. If this creature were dead, they might not put me to death. Why should I not kill her? But how do so without being found out? A thousand ideas at once presented themselves, but all seemed attended with too much risk.

At last one occurred to me that seemed feasible.

Why not let a snake bite her?

I could manage to catch one the next time I

went to the fungi cave, bring it back, and put it in her hair bed before she went to sleep.

It would bite her ; she would die, and I should be freed from her persecutions.

It would not kill me, as the other bite had had no effect.

But if it did, that death would be preferable to being burned, or to living as her husband. Cruel, cowardly, wicked as it may seem, I had no compunction in deciding to kill this creature who had saved my life, but was feverish with desire to accomplish the murder, and only longed to know that she was dead.

Having decided on my mode of action, I rose from the hair I had been sitting on. Just as I did so, the white female entered the cave, carrying water and some fungi.

She came towards me, and, placing these on the floor, told me to eat and drink.

My conscience smote me.

What right had I to take the life of this creature, who only seemed to think of my welfare?

I cast these thoughts from me, and determined that nothing should divert me from my purpose.

Yet I would give her one more chance, and see if there was any other way of escaping her embraces.

She had thrown herself on some hair at my feet, and was watching me.

Turning to her, I said, "Do you care for me very much?"

She looked surprised and answered, "Of course, or else I should not want you to live with me."

"Supposing I were to die now, what would you do?" I asked.

"You will not die yet," she said, and smiled.

The answer and smile combined settled her fate.

Nothing should force me to submit to be kissed by those repulsive-looking lips, and to have that baboon's head resting on my breast.

Yes! Away with all remorse and compunction. She must die.

"When do you go again to the cave of snakes?" I enquired.

"After we sleep, some of the servants start," she answered. "I shall go with them," I said. "Why do you want to go?" "Why will you not stop here with me?" she asked. "I am tired of remaining in this cave. I shall not be absent long. You wait here until I return," I said.

"Then you will stay with me altogether?"

I nodded my head, and stretching myself on some hair, fell asleep.

When I awoke the female was sitting near my feet, and the light from her body made visible everything within a few yards.

Directly I opened my eyes she said, "They are waiting for you." I jumped up, and went outside the cave; she followed me.

There stood all the creatures holding the nets for carrying the fungi.

The white female wanted to come with me, but I said, "You will be tired; it is too far."

She looked pleased, poor thing, at the consideration my words implied, and said she would stay behind. So we set out without her, much to my satisfaction.

When we arrived at the snake cave, I left the others and wandered about under the pretence of looking for larger fungi.

Here and there were large patches or beds of the phosphorescent fungi, lighting up everything for some distance around.

Amongst these beds I searched for a small snake.

There were numbers of large ones, but very few small enough to hide in the coat-pocket of my pyjamas, where I intended to put it, and those that were small enough were very quick and difficult to catch.

After some trouble I succeeded in procuring one. It was very lively, and bit my finger as I caught it, but its bite, like that of the other, had no effect.

I put the snake in my pocket, tied the mouth up

so that it could not escape, and joined the others. They had filled the nets and were ready to return.

Directly I joined them we started.

Arriving at the opening of the passage that led into the big cave, we found the white female and several others waiting for us.

She had evidently been anxious about me, for directly she saw me she looked pleased, and, throwing her arms round me, kissed me.

Then she told me that since our departure a young one had been born, who was just like those who had lived, ages and ages before.

She insisted on my going to see it.

I did so, and found it with its mother; the father, who was like a baboon with the exception of having shorter arms, and being able to stand upright, was sitting on a rock near them, regarding the little beast with a look of pity in his deep-set eyes.

The young one, though only a few hours old, was already moving about near its mother on all fours, and had a long tail.

The white female wept. "This is what they will all be like soon," she said.

"You must live with me, and we will rear a new generation more like yourself. Our young ones shall breed with those amongst us who are most like me, and we will be saved from the awful fate of having

young ones like that," she added, pointing to the little baboon, whose mother was feeding it.

She called to one of the two servants who always attended me, and told him to take the young one and throw it into the crater.

The mother, on hearing this, set up an awful howl, and pressed the little one to her breast.

The father sat with his hideous head bowed on his hairy chest, taking no notice.

I asked her to spare it. "No!" she said, "It must die. If it lived, it would only breed others like itself."

And, in spite of the mother's resistance and yells, the little one was torn from her and carried away, moaning in the most piteous manner, to be thrown into the crater.

I followed, and saw the creature take the little one by the tail, and toss it into the boiling mass below.

Hardly had it passed over the side of the crater, when the mother, who had followed to see the last of her young one, uttered a piercing shriek, and jumped in after it.

The father stood on the brink, looking at the spot where she had disappeared, moaning, and beating his chest with his fists.

He made a weird picture, standing in the glaring light that issued from the crater. His long

bluish-white hair, and hideous face working in agony, showed minutely in the bright light, assisted by the glow of his own body.

We left him standing there, and returned to the small cave.

After we had been there a few moments, the white female went outside.

Immediately, I untied my pocket, took out the snake, and put it in the bed of hair she usually slept upon.

Then, going to the one I used, I threw myself down and pretended to be asleep.

Presently she entered, followed by the two creatures who attended me.

Seeing me lying down, she signalled for them to leave the cave ; then came to where I was, knelt down at my side, and put her face close to mine.

I shuddered inwardly, but still pretended I was asleep.

After waiting a little while she evidently thought I was unconscious, and not wishing to awake me, arose from her knees, and to my great relief walked to the pile of hair I had put the snake in.

By the light her body emitted I could see plainly.

If the snake had not left before she came, in a few minutes it would bite her and she would die.

Now the time had come, I felt a little com-

punction. She was very fond of me. I wondered if it would give her much pain. Those I had seen die in the cave suffered terribly. For a second I nearly lost control over myself, and called to her not to lie down. I checked this weakness, and waited anxiously to hear her cry. But no cry was uttered; she covered herself up with hair and went to sleep.

I never took my eyes off her, and kept acting over in my own mind the scene that I expected to occur momentarily.

How the snake would wake her up by biting her!

How she would start, put her hand to the place to see what it was, feel the snake, yell, jump up, stagger about, then fall in convulsions on the ground and die in agony!

This passed through my mind scores of times, each time with some other slight incident coupled to it, until it assumed so appalling a shape and so terrified me, that I determined to creep over and try and capture the snake and kill it before it bit her.

Rising to my feet very carefully, so as to make no noise, I approached the hair she was lying on.

I saw the head of the snake protruding from under the hair. Darting forward I tried to grasp it, but it was too quick, and slipped back amongst the hair.

I waited until I again saw it, but each time it evaded my grasp.

Suddenly I saw a shudder pass over the female's whole frame, and the next second the snake came from beneath the hair, and swiftly glided into the darkness.

Could it have bitten her ?

I placed my hand gently over her left breast, and could feel her heart beating very faintly. I pressed with greater force ; it awakened her.

Opening her eyes and seeing me, she stretched out her arms. As she did so a shudder convulsed her.

Her arms dropped, her head fell back, her jaw relaxed.

She was dead.

This poor, gentle, kind, hideous monstrosity was dead, and I was the murderer.

I was somehow glad she did not know I had killed her.

Creeping back to my own bed I threw myself on it, and tried to sleep but could not.

CHAPTER XI.

THE cave was now perfectly dark, the light from the body of the white female having gradually faded when she died.

It was too late now to think of the consequences of my act. I felt that directly any of the creatures came to the cave and saw that her body no longer emitted light, they would know she was dead.

One of my attendants appeared at the opening.

As I expected, all being dark, he entered, and saw the body. He ran to it, knelt down, touched it, and then uttered a frightful yell.

The other attendant rushed in, and on learning what was the matter, gave vent to a succession of the most horrible blood-curdling shrieks I have ever heard.

Soon the cave was filled with others, who, on hearing she was dead, joined them in giving utterance to their grief.

The scene was weird and grotesque.

These creatures, in the abandonment of their grief, resembled so many devils. Hundreds and hundreds crowded the cave and opening. They

took no notice of me, and in their sorrow must have forgotten my existence.

Suddenly, without the slightest warning, a sound as of a thousand cannons broke on our ears.

The earth shook with such force that numbers were thrown off their feet on to the ground.

With a yell that was nearly drowned by the noise of the falling rocks, they rushed from the cave in a struggling mass.

One only remained—a servant the white female had given to me.

He took up a position near the body, and was so wrapt up in his sorrows that he did not seem to pay any attention to the shaking of the earth.

After a few seconds it shook with redoubled violence.

The walls of the cave swayed to and fro, large pieces of rock broke from them, and some fell close to where I was lying.

I jumped up and ran to the opening, but could go no further.

A large stream of lava coming from the direction of the crater flowed between me and the large cave. In the cave I could see hundreds of the creatures running hither and thither in the most aimless manner, their crying and shrieking being heartrending.

There was no chance of getting to the other side,

as the stream was already twelve or fourteen feet wide.

It spread with the most frightful rapidity, and overtook some of them who had been unable to gain a high spot.

With hideous shrieks they fell into the bubbling lava—in a second disappeared, and were carried along in the boiling torrent.

Numbers had managed to gain rocks above it, and escaped for the time being.

The trembling of the earth detached some of the rocks they were on; they would fall, clutching wildly at the sides until they were engulfed in the seething mass.

Standing where I was, the heat became unbearable, so I returned to the opening of the small cave, and climbing up the rocks, seated myself on a ledge as far as possible above the ground.

Here I had a view of those on the other side.

Occasionally one, overcome with the heat, with a feeble cry, would let go his hold and fall fainting into the molten lava.

The servant climbed on a rock close to me. The stream of lava looked like a long thread of fire, as it flowed along the passage in the direction of the "cave of snakes."

The shrieks of those who saw it gradually rising to the ledges they were on, the low rumbling in

the earth, and the roar of the fiery steaming mass as it rushed amongst the rocks, were sounds never to be forgotten.

A large piece of the wall on the opposite side fell with a great crash, bearing hundreds of the creatures with it. The expression of their faces as they touched the lava was most frightful.

The stream was rising rapidly, and at the present rate would be up to my ledge in an hour. In less than that time I knew the heat would suffocate me. So I left my position, and climbed along the wall to the cave where the body of the white female lay.

The lava had already entered the opening and was gradually covering the floor.

In a few seconds it consumed the hair, and, reaching the body, soon covered it—filling the cave with an odour of burnt flesh.

The servant followed me wherever I went; when he saw the body of his mistress burning, his grief burst forth anew.

I gained a place about twenty feet from the ground, and resigned myself to my fate.

By the light from the lava, and the body of my attendant, I was able to see distinctly.

Looking about me, I perceived a hole in the wall a few feet above.

I determined to try and reach it.

The earth shook every few moments—each time I expected to be precipitated from the ledge.

It was too steep to climb straight up, so I commenced to crawl towards the hole in a zig-zag manner.

I had gained a ledge about three feet from it when the creature, who, I thought, had been paying no attention to my movements, gave a shrill cry, and sprang at me.

The onset was so sudden that I nearly lost my foot-hold.

With an effort I recovered myself, and, catching the creature by its short throat, tried to choke it.

Lucky for me, I had chosen weak, small ones for my servants, for, had it been a large male, I should not have had a chance.

As it was, each moment I thought he would get the better of me.

As we were struggling on the ledge, I tried to think of a reason for his sudden attack, but could not.

With a mighty effort he loosened my hold on his throat; as he did so his foot slipped, and he fell into the burning lava, leaving a lock of his long, bluish-white hair in my hand.

Looking down, I saw the snake on a ledge of rock, trying to escape from the heat.

This was the reason of his wish to kill me.

Seeing the snake, and knowing there were none on this side of the crevice, he had probably divined that I had brought it here and killed his mistress with it.

None of them would have dared to touch it, much less to carry it from one cave to the other.

Gaining the hole, I passed through, the light from the molten lava permitting me to see that the opening extended some distance. It was not very wide, and about nine or ten feet high in the part I stood in.

It ascended for the short distance I could see.

Was it possible for this passage to lead me outside these awful caves? I ran along, each moment expecting to be crushed.

The noise was tremendous even here. I could hear the shrieks of some of the creatures who were not yet dead.

Slipping and stumbling I rushed along in the darkness.

The passage must have widened, for though I could hear the stones falling from the sides, none came near me; and by the sound of those falling I was saved from running into the walls.

Breathless, and fainting, I hurried on.

How long I continued running I have no idea; but at last, in the distance, high above me, I saw a light.

The passage ascended towards it. This gave me a fresh impetus, and with hope in my breast I climbed the steep path.

My feet and hands, bleeding from the many sharp rocks they had come in contact with, caused me great pain; but now I seemed to forget them.

That light was to me as a star of hope, guiding my weary, faltering footsteps from hell to heaven.

The earth still shook, occasionally with such violence, that I was thrown off my feet.

Now that I saw some chance of getting out of the place, I felt hopeless—that I was doomed to die—that however near I came to the light I should never reach it. This was an additional torture.

A piece of rock fell from above, and striking my left shoulder felled me to the ground. Though nearly insensible from the effects of the blow, I managed to regain my feet and stumbled on.

I had not advanced two hundred yards from the spot, when there was a mighty shock, and hundreds of tons of earth fell from the sides, and covered the place where I had been standing. Nearer and nearer I approached the light.

Yes! thank God! I could see the sky.

At last I was in the open air, the fresh wind of

heaven playing on my face, and the rippling sea stretched out before my dazzled eyes.

With what little remaining strength was left me, I crawled through the hole, which was about four feet in diameter.

Hardly had I done so than the earth shook, then swayed to and fro—small stones and dust, accompanied with a crashing noise like thunder, seemed to be forced through the opening.

The passage had collapsed. I staggered to my feet—tried to walk—everything turned round and round; the earth seemed to rise up; I fell, and remember no more.

CHAPTER XII.

THE next thing I was conscious of was a feeling of drowsy contentment.

Opening my eyes I saw I was in bed in a small room. The sound that had awakened me came from the next room, and was caused by several voices. From the conversation, I gathered they were telling someone about finding a man on the side of Monte Epomeo, and now, seeing he was not dead, they had brought him home.

It suddenly dawned upon me that I was the subject under discussion.

Presently a man entered the room, by his dress evidently a shepherd. I asked where I was. He told me to "Keep quiet, as I was perfectly safe."

"How long have I been here?"

"Three weeks."

"What has been the matter?"

"Brain fever. The doctor will be here shortly, do not talk until he comes."

When the doctor came he told me I had had a very narrow escape.

The shepherds had found me, brought me here, and I had been insensible and delirious in turns for weeks; raving about being buried alive, large serpents, phosphorescent bodies, baboons, and caves.

I found this place was on the opposite side of Mount Epomeo from Casamicciola. There had been a great earthquake, only one house in the whole town of Casamicciola had been left standing.

Thousands of lives had been lost, how many was not yet known.

The doctor asked me how I came to have on my pyjamas. And when I told him how I had been buried alive, he smiled and left the room.

He returned soon, carrying a glass in his hand. I drank the contents, and, soon feeling drowsy, sank into a refreshing sleep.

It was about a month after my return to consciousness before I was able to leave my kind nurses.

When I did so I went to Casamicciola.

I searched amongst the ruins of my house and found my bureau. Of course, all my money was gone, but in one of the drawers was the certificate of my death and burial.

My valet, not knowing where to send it, had evidently put it there.

I engaged a man, and together we searched for the vault.

But having a very faint idea of where it was, and the earthquake having torn the ground about, we were unable to find it.

He (the man) evidently looked upon me as a harmless lunatic.

I wrote to my bankers, and having received some money, made my kind nurses a substantial present, and soon after left the land of so many unpleasant memories.

Often I dream I am again in the caves, and wake, wet with perspiration, and with a prayer of thankfulness on my lips, to find it is only a dream.

There is little more to be told. I must have passed about twelve days in the cave, from the 15th to the 28th or 29th of July.

I have given a truthful and unembellished

account of my horrible experience; whether it is believed or not, as I said at the beginning, is a matter of complete indifference to me. I write this in London, and, in a few days, leave for Australia. I have inherited consumption from my mother, and the doctors only give me a few years to live. There I mean to pass as far away as possible from the scenes of my misery.

There is only one proof I can give of having passed through these experiences, and that is—
“When the shepherds found me, in my hand I held a long lock of bluish-white hair.”

FINIS.

APPENDIX.

RECENT researches by Dr. Dubois on the Cucuyo (*Pyrophorus Noctilucus*) go to show that the light is evolved in a chemical process, and that the light-bearing organs retain their powers for some time—even when separated from the body—and that the application of water to these parts when dried sets up chemical reaction, a portion of the energy liberated appearing as light.

The above may elucidate in some degree the gradual paling of the phosphorescence after the death of the white female.

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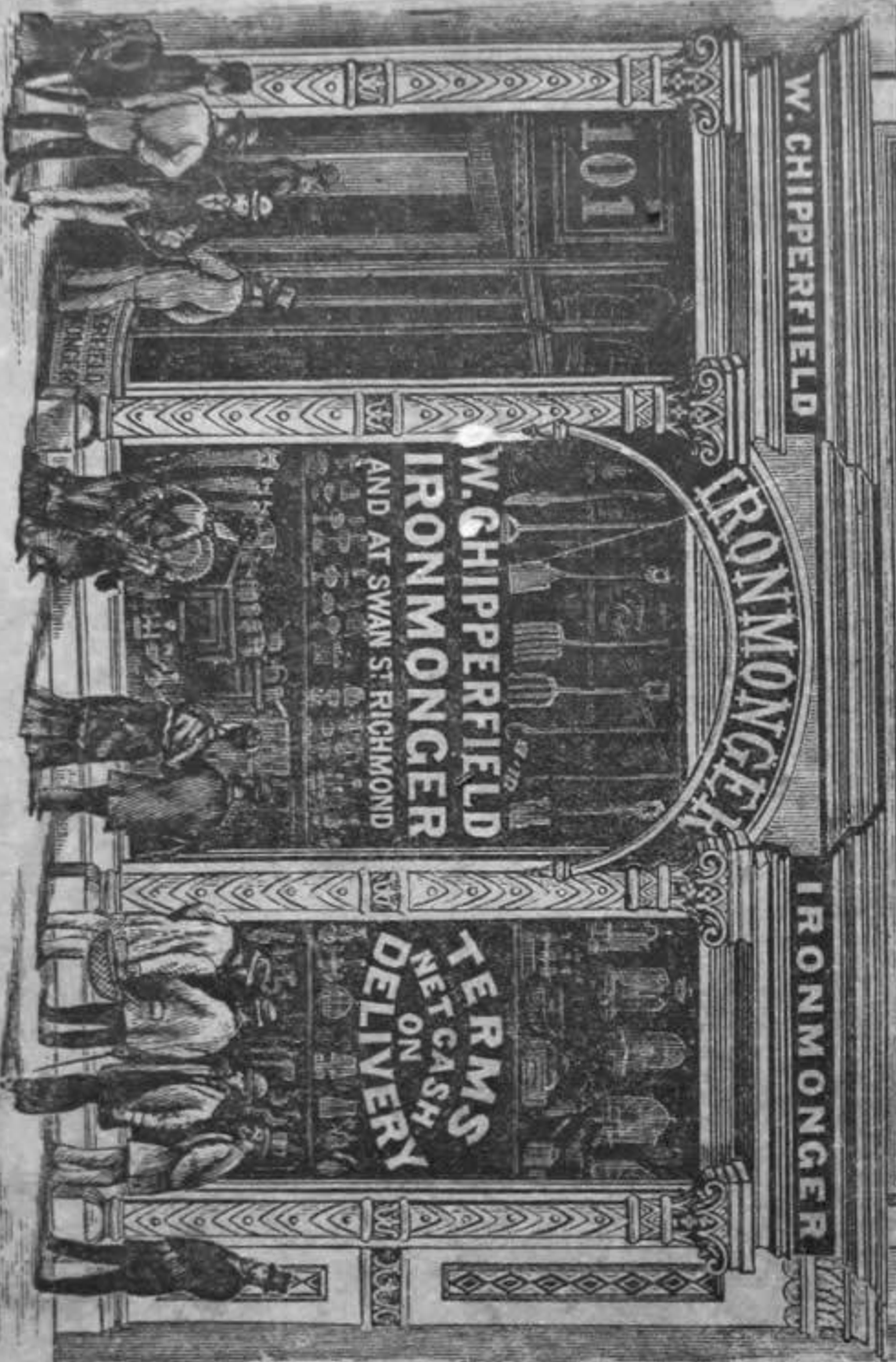
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